

Watchtowers

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Summary: She always was a strange girl, just past 16, more questions than she could have answers for, more theories than proof. Still, he enjoyed her company on those endless watchtower shifts more than he'd ever admit.

1. Chapter 1

****AN:** so this story is set decades before the first movie, when the adults and parents of Hiccup and the others are only teens themselves. I particularly wanted to write Valka before her life with the dragons, as someone who still lived on Berk, knew it's ways, it's people. I hope you enjoy it:)******

"So it looks like we're on watchtower duty together again? What is this, forth time this week, isn't it? Wouldn't be a coincidence, would it?"

He perked up to the sound of that familiar female voice behind him. The girl, only a teenager at the time, was still quite small and lean, her red hair parted into two braided ponytails hanging over her shoulders. She carefully pulled herself up the ladder, the studs in her armour and the strap of her satchel trying to grab the splintered wood as she did. How the pull of the wood hadn't ripped that fading leather bag was a mystery.

The village teenagers were always assigned the painful task of late afternoon watchtower duty. It was "something they can't screw up" he'd overheard his father say to his uncle once. It was probably for the best, looking at the majority peers. All bumbling and massive, beards that hadn't grown in and tempers that still couldn't be controlled. Even the biggest muttonhead on Berk, who at the time, Thorston's oldest boy, could manage watch tower. But good company certainly made it more enjoyable.

"Aye, I might put in a good word ta the chief."

"And you have some influence with him, don't you Stoick?" She smiled and brushed her overgrown bangs from her face. Stoick chuckled and setting his spyglass off to the side. He'd hear the dragons coming, wouldn't he? There were more important things on that old, rickety watchtower for him to be looking at.

"Well once ya take down yer first Monstrous Nightmare in dragon training he finally gives ya a little respect," he stated proudly.

"He should really start, if you're going to replace him some day," she said as she took her seat on the opposite side of the watchtower, "Think you'll be ready?"

"No one's ever ready to be chief Val." "Spitlout says he is, he got in a fight with Gobber and Alvin about it a few days ago." She laughed at the memory, the arrogant teen might have had a shot against one, but not two of his own peers. "Gerda was watching too, he's been going on about it for two days now, whining like a child, blubbering fool."

"Aye? Wish I could've seen that!"

"Oh it was a show," she admitted, "I know training to replace your father is a lot of work, but it's a shame you-"

"Valka-"

"Miss out on everything with your friends," she paused before adding, "they're your future war council after all."

"And you."

"Aye, and me. If I weren't on watch duty with you every other day." She rolled her eyes as she began to pull things out of her bag. Some papers, sticks of charcoal, her personal spyglass, andâ€"

"Is that the dragon manual?"

She smiled. "I've been doing a little research of my own, figured there might be something here." She tapped the book. "Our scaly friends haven't given us much to go on though. I asked to get in to see Bork's notes, but they shut me down every time, said I should be worrying about fighting dragons, not studying them."

And there it was, Val, being, well, Val. Incredibly curious, over thinking everything, always asking for answers that she didn't know, always finding answers to the questions no one else could tell her, or would, answer. To say that she was going to drive the adults and elders insane by the time she was an adult with some sort of influence was an understatement.

The chief's son didn't even have a chance to reply before the young girl started, asking "did you see the two Nadders that Sven and his father took down a few nights ago?"

"Aye, Sven's first kill ya know, but he hasn't said a word since. Scrawny things weren't they? Gobber was gone ta use the scales forâ€" He actually hadn't asked what Gobber had planned for the

scales. It was probably for the best. "Somethin'.

Val shook her head. "He's going to lose an arm and a leg in that forge someday, I swear, if a dragon doesn't get to 'um first." She carefully flipped through her papers. "But those Nadders, have you ever seen dragons that frail? You could see the outlines of the bones right underneath their scales. It's like they haven't been eating."

"Haven't been eating? Val, they've made twice as many raids in the last year than they have in decades, they take entire flocks of sheep, yaks, cattle, even vikingsâ€" "And don't seem to touch any of it by the looks of it. If we find out why they aren't eating it themselves, maybe we could trace what they do eat, where else the hunt, it might get us closer to finding the nest. We could scare them away from Berk, send them somewhere else."

"I'll talk ta my father."

He hadn't. Not that he hadn't tried. The chief was far from a reasonable man when it came to dragons. The second he'd mentioned it had been Val's idea, the chief shut him down and walked off.

Whatever Stoick said after that, he couldn't quite remember himself, she hadn't listened. Instead, her green eyes starred off into the endless sea, the wind blowing her hair around her face and rustling her papers. Drawings, he'd noted, of the dragons she studied so enthusiastically. There was never any fear or worry in her eyes around the beast, only eager fascination. She was still young, young enough to be brave, not quite old enough to be afraid. An incident waiting to happen. She began to drag the charcoal across her paper again, confidently marking up the pages with whatever filled her head. She was a good speaker, a smart diplomat, a strong fighter, but never was she more comfortable in her abilities than when drawing up on that tower, just the two of them and her imagination. Dragons, maps, Phlegma claimed she'd even seen the ginger girl drawing him a few times, (and when asked, she'd completely deny and tuck her book away in her vest.)

Time hadn't stopped, but he hadn't noticed it kept moving on, the sun creeping closer to the orange sea. He wasn't a sap of any sort, Odin knows he's the farthest viking from that at Berk, but in these moments, he doesn't complain about the silence or the unnatural calmness.

She sighed, her body relaxing into the corner of the tower. She'd put her drawings away, her satchel clasped shut. "Terror got your tongue?" she asked playfully, "never thought I'd see Stoick the Vast so silent." When he still didn't answer, she asked, "you are watching for dragons, aren't you?"

When he defensively stated he was, she simply laughed, "that makes one of us." She stood up, adjusting her armour and throwing her bag strap over her shoulder. "I heard Alvin and Gobber coming, looks like our shift is over." She'd offered a hand to help him up, as if she could do any good.

"S'pose it is." He could hear his friends below them, shouting and jeering about some unknown matter.

"Back to training."

"So soon?"

"It's the-"

"Role of the heir, I know, I know." She didn't know, of course. Trying to convince Val to follow through with even the simplest traditional procedure was a nightmare for certain.

"Wouldn't kill the chief if you were a little behind, would it?" She laughed, and twisting her fingers around a small braid in his hair. She pulled him down to her level, a smile on her face. "I thought you were going to take this out? Wasn't 'manly' enough?"

"I will." He wouldn't, of course. She'd been the one to put it there after all.

"Keep it, you look good with braids. More... Grown up." Again, she pulled him close and suddenly her lips pressed against his cheek. "Now, don't you have some chief in to do? Hooligans to wrangle and whatnot?"

"Whatnot?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Always have to have room for whatnot, Stoick." She had already turned to the ladder. "Never know what might happen."

"And yer an expert in chiefting, are ya?" He asked, leaning over the edge as she climbed down.

"I will be. I'm sure of that." She said brightly, her cheeks taking on the colour of her hair.

2. Chapter 2

Berk was a decent place to live, all things considered. The food, while bland and tasteless was plentiful. Just like the people. The landscapes were beautiful from up on the watchtowers or high in a tree, but from the ground they were unfortunately familiar. Again, just like the people. Most of the time, much more interesting to watch than to actually interact with.

Unfortunately, societal norms said she couldn't avoid it. And thus, every afternoon that she wasn't either on watchtower duty, doing important chores, or working in her father's shop, her mother insisted she spend her free time with company like Gerda Bjorgman or Brynn Hanson. "That girl spends too much time with the chief son before their married, it'll be good for her, I promise ye!" she'd gone on to tell her husband.

Little did her mother know, perhaps these two weren't the best company, and whether or not she enjoyed it was up for debate.

"Val! What's my time?"

"Seventy-five zipplebacks."

"And the village record?"

"43."

"Haddock?"

"Hofferson."

"Finn or Bjorn?"

"Bjorn."

"Shoot."

Gerda's axe had hit every target, her speed was off the charts, faster than anyone else's, but she clearly lacked the sheer size that had made it so easy for that Hofferson boy to obliterate her score.

The young girl's straw blond hair was dripping with sweat, sticking to her flushed cheeks and forehead, her braid had unraveled over the span of her many attempts, much of her furs and armour abandoned at her friend's feet, just close enough she could throw it back on in event of an inevitable attack. Her frustration had made the normally beautiful, graceful girl appear as feral and vicious as a dragon.

For her sake as well as her parents, it was best that only her friends saw her in this rabid state.

"I'm going to beat it, I'm going to beat him! Sooner or later, that boy is going to be standing in my dust!"

"Or at the alterâ€" Brynn perked in, only to have the axe chucked in her direction before she could finish. "Hey! I'm yer friend here!" Brynn roughly snatched the thrown axe and held it as far away from Gerda as she could without moving from her seat on a nearby log.

"I'm not marrying that son of a half troll and you know it!"

"I'm sure Spitelout will be happy to hear that," Val had stupidly added.

Gerda groaned in disgust. "I'm not marrying any of them! I'm not ever gonna marry some stupid Berk boy, with their stupid records and their stupid stupidity. I'm gonna get offa Berk, I'm gonna be a hero, I'm gonnaâ€" Figure the rest out from there!" She began to soften up as she went to retrieve her axe. "I'm gonna take a boat soon, ya know. Go off, see if the Bog Burglars'll take me."

"And that's why you're training so much?"

Gerda sighed and dropped her axe. She reclined against a rock and crossed her arms. "There's got to be more in life than getting married and then raisin' kids and fightin' dragons 'til ye die. Believe you me, if my parents make me marry that stupid Hofferson boy, I'm never gonna let my daughter, if one ever gets stuck with me as a mum, poor bugger, she's never gonna have to be a bored l'il housewife."

"Oi, a l'il girl like you? Well she's gonna put ye through everythin' ye put yer poor parents through," Brynn laughed out loud, "Screamin' til yer head falls off, choppin' down halfa forest with 'er axe, ain't no daughter of Gerda Bjorgman that'll ever carry something' as wimpy as a sword, aye?"

"Aye? Well I'll wish that right back on ya! Twice even. Destructive mess just like ya!"

Brynn laughed. "Ah, yea, right! I ain't scared of yer curses!"

"Ye will be!"

"You too Valka!"

"What'd I do?"

"You laughed!"

"What're you two fightin' over now?" I can hear ye half back ta the village." Ilsa must have crept up behind them, they hadn't heard her dainty footsteps coming through the forest. For such a stocky young woman, she was as light on her feet as those celtic traders who'd dance on the piers. Her laundry basket was rested on her hip, her unruly blonde hair falling out of her braid in places.

"I ain't marryin'--"

"--No Hofferson Boy? Gerdie, not this 'gain, both yer dad's pretty much got the contract drawn up, mosta the village knows it. Yer gonna have ta suck it up sooner or later, have ye seen the bride price yet? Finn says it's more than enough ta buy yerself a ship I swear!"

"Then I'll take the ship and leave Berk, simple as that!" Gerda snapped. "I'm not some livestock fer ma parents ta sell, I'm a real person ya know!"

"Real crazy oneâ€œ"

"Brynn, I can hear ye!"

"Ignore her, she's just jealous there's been no one knocking on the door ta talk ta her daddy yet!" Ilsa, typically sweet, gentle Ilsa, added bravely.

Brynn gasped offensively, tightly crossing her skinny arms over her chest. "Have too! Just two weeks ago, a trader came askin' and ma dad said no! Then the next day, that boy that got his head bashed a few weeks ago, his dad came too. S'more boys already than any of you got."

Ilsa giggled as she took a seat on a stump near her friends. "Quality, not quantity sweetheart. Mr. Ingerman and my father were talking, I mean, I don't know if they were trying to arrange something or not, but if he is, well." She sheepishly pulled her collar around her cheeks to hide her blush. "Well it'd be nice wouldn't it? He's a baker, and we've been friends for years, a perfect arrangement, isn't it?"

"And he's rich."

"Brynn!"

"I'm just sayin' what we're all thinkin', but," she paused to throw an arm around Valka, playful jabbing her side, "We all know who's really set for life, eh? Miss Future Chief's wife."

And there it was, the inevitable topic that made spending time with her peers less and less desirable by the day.

"That's not why I'm marryin' him Bryndel and ye know that."

Brynn giggled, forcing her friend into a playful, but painful hug, "But eh, it's a benefit, huh? All ye'll ever have ta do is cook and be a pretty host for foreigners, that's what Miss Mageye said she's ever seen Thorstorm ever have ta do."

"Ye know that isn't true."

"Is too true!" Bryn insisted.

"No it ain't," Gerda agreed, "But it's sure gonna be a lot easier when she's got Stoick wrapped right 'round her finger, ain't it?"

"Aye, that there is true now, eh Val?"

Valka forced her friends arms off of her, roughly shoving her away. She was not going to sit and listen to this again, not for the four hundredth time this week. "No, it's not, I'm not the boss of him."

"Yer gonna be his wife, if that ain't the closest ta a boss of the chief, I dunno what is." Gerda laughed as she spoke, her restless hands twisting the hilt of her axe between them.

"Then why doesn't the bossiest girl want ta get married?"

"Shut up Brynn."

Looking up to the sky, Valka sighed happily, saying, "Ye know, it's late in the evening, I should head back, I'll bet Gobber's back in the shop, gonna see if he'll let me see Bork's notes." She jumped up quickly before Brynn could pull her back, only to have any friend reach for her.

"You still aren't hung up on Sven's nadders, are ya Val?" Ilsa asked, grabbing the girls hand before she could sneak away. "Ain't healthy to spend so much time fixated on them things."

"Yeah, ye'll end up sympathizin' with 'em dragons, keepin' terrors as a pet and gettin' eggs from a gronkle instead of a chicken, that's whatâ€" Brynn froze, "what I heard someone sayin'."

"That's what you heard the chief sayin', believe me, I know. Heard him yellin' the same thing at Stoick the other day." Valka's voice was flat as she spoke. "But ye know as well as I do there's something not right with those nadders, and I'm not just going ta sit around

and ignore it, i might find somethin' ta give Berk a fighting chance."

"That's all, huh."

"That's all, now if only I could convince the chiefâ€"

Brynn smiled that knowing smile, the one that for some many years typically preceded a plan for trouble or information she wasn't supposed to know. "Don't worry yer l'il heart 'bout it, Thor and Odin couldn't convince the Chief of anything, I heard old man Grungebeard 'tually admit that Stoick's gon'ta be a better chief and everythin', at least he'll listen ta some reason."

"He wouldn't be the first ta say it either, buncha the villages have been sayin' it too, even the old ones, it's a good time ta change," Gerda agreed cheerfully, a little too cheerfully to be natural, but Valka hadn't the patience to question it at the time, "Now ya'd better head off before Gobber decides ta put ya to work instead a lettin' ya see them old notes of Borks."

She nodded, saying her goodbyes as quickly as possible to sneak off the the forge before her parents realized she was off "sticking her nose into things she didn't need to know."

She already knew she'd have at least one person to call her out on it before they even found out.

So this took way longer than expected, I lost the document and with it a lot of motivation. As I'm doing with my other stories, I'm hoping to update once a week, this story every wednesday, and the other every Friday. Hope you enjoyed it, see you all in a week.

End
file.